

OUR ADVENT PILGRIMAGE
December 2, 2007, Advent 1 – Year A
Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close, Grace Church, Haddonfield, NJ

(Homily Following the Service of Lessons & Carols)

*Open our eyes, O God, to the coming of your light,
And lift the burden of darkness from our lives.
Open our souls, O God, to the warmth of your coming,
Melt the hardness that keeps us from you and each other.
Cherish our hearts, O God, oppressed by the winters in our lives,
Assure us of your coming and the call to new life.
(Adapted from “Celtic Prayer for Advent”, Wellsprings)*

Today is the first day of the Church New Year, Advent. Advent invites us into a journey, a pilgrimage. In it we will move from the darkness to the light. During Advent, we are invited to move towards a vision of God’s peace, a peace that we humans are unable to attain. The Call that comes this season is to watch. Isaiah tells us that God is about to do something new. Matthew tells us that the Day will come suddenly! So here we are, on this cold, dark, wintry day ... and it seems to be appropriate that we commence a journey towards warmth and light!

Sister Barbara Jean Brown (Anamchara Fellowship, Wilmington, Delaware) led our Advent Quiet Day yesterday. As she spoke about Celtic Spirituality, she mentioned that one of its core values was the notion of pilgrimage. We must remember that a pilgrimage is a spiritual journey, not a trip or a tour. Sister Barbara Jean shared that its not the destination that is important, but the journey! On the journey, we are to wait, to reflect, to look and to listen!

At the Advent Quiet Day, Sister Barbara Jean asked us to leave our baggage at the door, to sit in the holy place and let the spirit sink in. She invited us to see what God was offering. We would be wise to do the same with our advent pilgrimage. We need to leave our baggage at the church door, come into this holy place, and let God’s spirit soak into us! Our advent journey is not a tour where we try to visit all the spots possible. It’s not about filling every moment. Advent invites us to discover, “Emmanuel”, God with us! If we listen, God will speak. If we look, God will show. If we open ourselves, God will come.

Herb O’Driscoll says that during Advent we are called to WATCH. He says that the season of Advent focuses on our God who is about to do something new. It will come suddenly, it will come when we least expect it, and God’s act will be shattering.

The problem, is that we don’t know how to live into a pilgrimage. We’ve become so caught up in our human plans and activities that we’ve lost sight of our faith. Our busyness has captured our minds, our attention and our loyalty. We are so busy with Christmas shopping, buying the right gift, decorating and partying that nothing else can enter into our lives. Our culture has made these things all-important, and that blurs and blots out the spiritual.

The answer for we Christians is to embrace an alternative lifestyle. We are to watch for the signs of God’s coming. We are to look for the presence of God. We are to wait for

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God's miracle to enter into our existence! The pilgrimage is a journey that doesn't focus on all the tourist stops and traps ... no, it is about experiencing life in God! It is about moving towards the new life the Divine One holds out to us.

Isaiah speaks this morning about a promise, of Judgment and hope, of learning then teaching God's ways. Matthew talks of a sign, the end of our old age and the coming of a new age. He warns us to be ready, to be prepared. Advent invites us into a new way of being, with promise of a new one, Jesus, who will lead us from darkness to light, from coldness to warmth, from death to life. This morning, we invite you to come along on the pilgrimage!